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ABSTRACT

Project Success Environment is an experimental program sponsored by the Atlanta Public Schools and funded by the State Department of Education under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The focus of this program, subtitled "An approach to Community Educational Improvement," is the development of a success technique for use with inner city pupils. The success technique is an application of reinforcement theory to modify pupil behavior utilizing relevant, rewarding experiences with positive outcomes as the reinforcer. Over a three-year period, the major goals or objectives of the program are: to train teachers, assistant teachers, and pupil models to use the success technique; to observe, record, and evaluate behavioral changes that occur in project pupils who are exposed to success technique; and, to develop, refine, and document the success technique based on experience obtained from utilizing and evaluating it, so that it can be replicated in other schools or cities. Criterial behavior being observed include conduct, academic achievement, and self-concept. Although it is too early to be able to draw conclusions from the data collected, the evidence is promising. For example, over the first 22 weeks of the school year, disruptions per student dropped from around 3.5 to around 1.5. (Author/JM)

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**THIS CHART
IN SCHOOL.**



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PROJECT SUCCESS ENVIRONMENT is funded by a grant from the Georgia Department of Education under Title III, ESEA, 1965 (P.L. 89-10).



ALL THE ODDS ARE AGAINST HIS SUCCEEDING.

He is an *inner city* child, a product of a negative environment. Many of his contemporaries are far below the norms in educational achievement.

WHY DOES HE SUCCEED?

There is no one answer to this question. Inner city children have succeeded in the past—some because they have learned to play the game of “please the teacher;” others, because they are highly motivated; others, because they get help from some source.

One possible reason for this child’s success is his participation in a program called *PROJECT SUCCESS ENVIRONMENT*.

This is an experimental program sponsored by the Atlanta Public Schools and funded by the State Department of Education under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (P.L. 89-10). The focus of this program, *PROJECT SUCCESS ENVIRONMENT: An Approach to Community Educational Improvement*, is the development of a *success* technique for use with inner city pupils.

WHAT IS A SUCCESS ENVIRONMENT?

It is an attempt—a special project—of the Atlanta Public Schools to find a new and better way of meeting the needs of the inner city student. It is predicated upon the thesis that success breeds success, as aptly stated by Glasser*:

... I have discovered an important fact: regardless of his background, his culture, his color, or his economic level, he will not succeed in general until he can in some way first experience success in one important part of his life. Given the first success to build upon, the negative factors, the ones emphasized by sociologists, mean little.

* W. Glasser, SCHOOLS WITHOUT FAILURE, 1969.

The major consultant* for *PROJECT SUCCESS ENVIRONMENT* views the project:

The three major goals of Project Success as I see them--and this is a subjective statement based on my own professional and personal interests in education--are (1) to work to help teachers actualize themselves so they can teach happily, without undue conflict, and by the use of predominantly positive rather than negative techniques; (2) thus, to make school a happy experience for students rather than the experience of frustration, boredom, and defeat that it all too frequently is for low income children (and, all too often, for children in general); and (3) finally, within this setting, to demonstrate that student competence as defined by school achievement develops more rapidly than in the typical school classroom atmosphere.

I regard this plan as among the most feasible, innovative, and promising of any of the many educational and research enterprises with which I have been associated over the years. It may--just may--provide one of the desperately needed breakthroughs in elementary and middle school practice.

The theory behind the success approach, the success technique, is a blend from several sources: operant conditioning, classical conditioning, and behavior modification. The success technique, however, is more than an amalgam. Rather, it is an application of reinforcement theory to modify pupil behavior utilizing relevant, rewarding experiences with positive outcomes as the reinforcer. The emphasis of the technique is the positive reinforcement of *success* in every child.



Over a three-year period, the major goals or objectives of *PROJECT SUCCESS ENVIRONMENT* are:

- to train teachers, assistant teachers, and pupil models to use the success technique.
- to observe, record, and evaluate behavioral changes that occur in project pupils who are exposed to success technique. *Behaviors to be observed include conduct, academic achievement, and self-concept.*
- to develop, refine, and document the success technique based on experience obtained from utilizing and evaluating it so that it can be replicated in other schools or cities.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The implementation of the project is the result of the cooperative efforts of the project staff consultants, teachers, assistant teachers, data gatherers, and students.

There are eight classrooms—five elementary and three middle school—in which the success technique is being developed and applied.

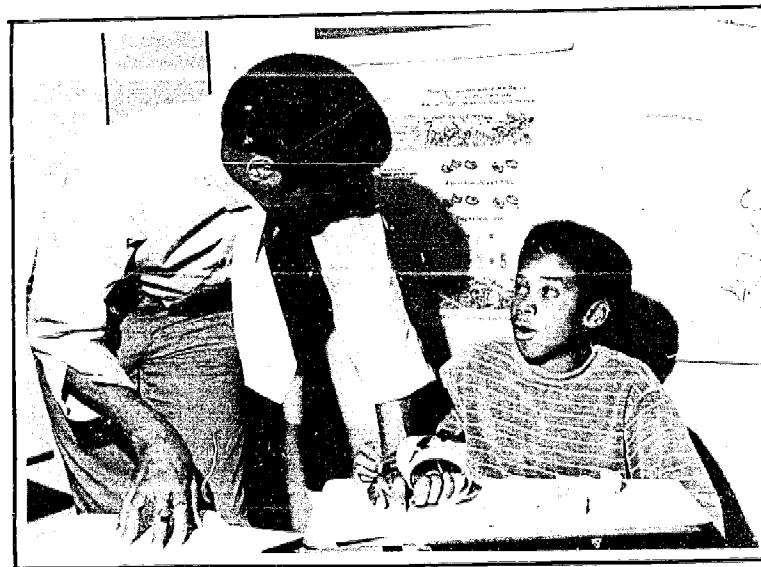
Whitefoord Elementary	Two First Grades One Second Grade
Wesley Avenue Elementary	Two Third Grades
Coan Middle School	Three Seventh Grades

The teachers in these classrooms received training in the success technique prior to the opening of school and continue to participate in training experiences as the technique is refined. They are assisted in their classrooms by assistant teachers and receive continuing help and support from the project staff and consultants. The project staff, a director, research assistant, coordinators of elementary and middle school activities, and support personnel, are in constant touch with the classroom teachers and assist in every way possible. The work of the project staff with the classroom teachers is supplemented by data gatherers and technicians who also work in the classrooms daily. The prime responsibility of the data gatherers is to record observational data about the children and the teacher on each of the two visits to the classroom daily. The behavior technicians* observe and then work with the project staff, teachers, and assistant teachers in refining the success technique.

*Skilled technicians in the area of behavior development.

The teacher in the classroom receives no accolades, no extra pay for participating in the program. Each classroom is limited to 25 students, and assistant teachers* are provided for the first year of the project as well as a great deal of training and assistance from the project staff. In the second year of the project, the assistant teacher will be removed from the classroom. This change is based on the rationale of the technique's being applicable to *any* classroom setting.

*At Coan Middle School, the assistant teachers are male, while they are female in the elementary classrooms.



WHAT HAPPENS?

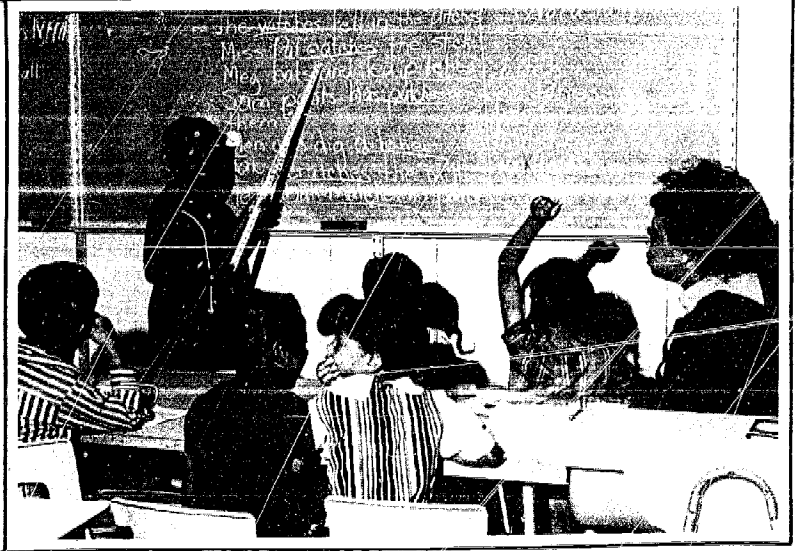
The activities are planned so that every child has an opportunity to and *does* succeed . . .



at learning



at playing

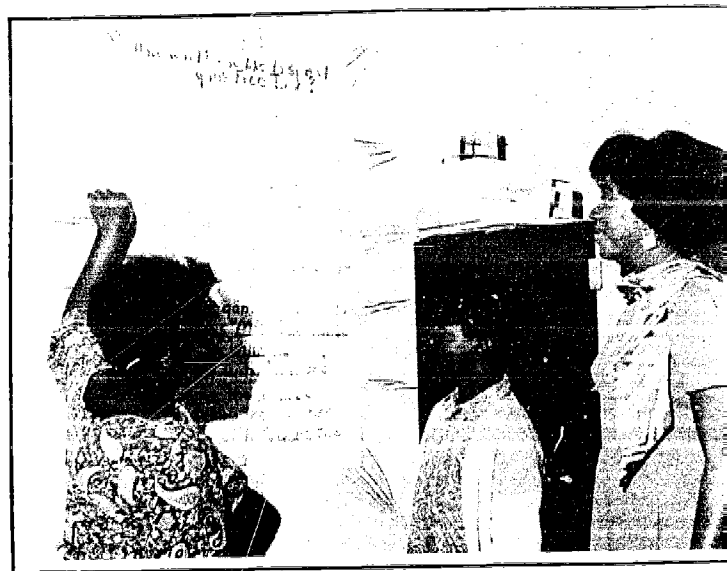


The key to this success is the classroom environment. Both teachers and assistant teachers participated in training experiences prior to the initiation of the program. These experiences included thorough examinations and explorations of the theories behind the approach and actual classroom settings with children in which to experiment with techniques and methods as they were introduced.

Initially, the reinforcers were focused on social behaviors. Four major goals were proposed, and students were rewarded for achieving these goals:

- *stay in your seat.*
- *work hard.*
- *pay attention.*
- *raise your hand.*

Considered alone, these four major behavioral goals for students smack of "good, old fashioned, traditional, desks-in-a-row" classrooms. In a success environment, such is *not* the case. These four behavioral goals for students were and continue to be a set of behaviors that every child can master and exhibit successfully. Coupled with individual methods of instruction, these goals served as a launching device for the success technique.



The reinforcement given for successfully achieving these goals runs the range from candy to praise, from records to privileges, from pencils to being a mini-teacher. Initially, the reinforcers used in the elementary school were *M and M's* and, later, check marks on a card which could be turned in for puzzles, dolls, jacks, race-cars. In the middle school, food items were soon replaced by tickets which could be redeemed for pencils, legal pads, model cars, 45 rpm records.

As the behaviors that received reinforcers became more academic in nature, the reinforcers became more intangible—privileges, time-off, opportunity to choose an activity such as

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE TEACHER?

The teacher becomes success oriented.

She exhibits full understanding and acceptance of guidelines set up for reinforcement situations:

Social reinforcement

- 1. Social reinforcement will not work with all children but will work with most. Additional procedures may be required.*
- 2. Rules alone do little to influence behavior. They must be made important by providing reinforcement for behaving according to the rules.*
- 3. Many kinds of verbal commands may appear to be effective in eliminating undesired behavior. However, appearances may be deceiving. While commands and critical comments may cue the child to stop a particular unwanted behavior, the attention given to that behavior by the persons making the command or critical comment actually reinforce its occurrence. Learning not to*

respond to disruptive behaviors is important for effective teaching. "Ignore" is a key word.

- 4. If the teacher, through the use of her verbal behavior, can in fact create "good" or "bad" classroom behaviors, and the controlling variables can be isolated and modified, there is little reason why all teachers cannot be taught to become more effective.*
- 5. Educational psychologists have often indicated that a good teacher is one who is warm and positive with her children, and that it matters significantly who the teacher praises (reinforces) and for what behavior.*

Token reinforcement

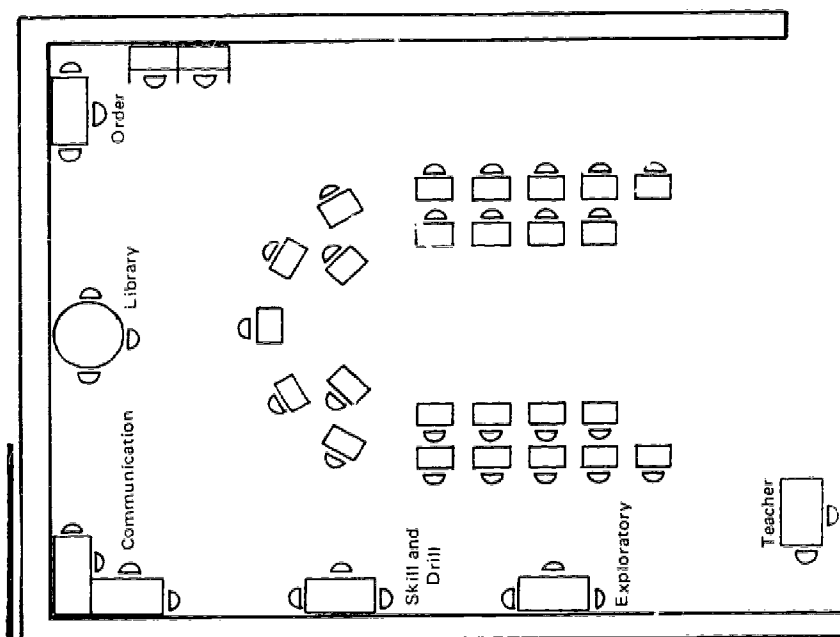
- 1. Reinforcers given immediately are more effective than delayed reinforcers.*
- 2. Tokens or points serve as conditioned reinforcers which can be backed up by many effective reinforcers.*



As individuals, the teachers participating in *PROJECT SUCCESS ENVIRONMENT* have reacted positively to the entire experience. Not only have they found the training useful, the technique workable and rewarding, but they express wonder at *not* being totally worn-out and beaten-down at the end of the day. For them, teaching has become an easier and rewarding process.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE CLASSROOM?

PROJECT SUCCESS ENVIRONMENT
Classroom Interest Stations



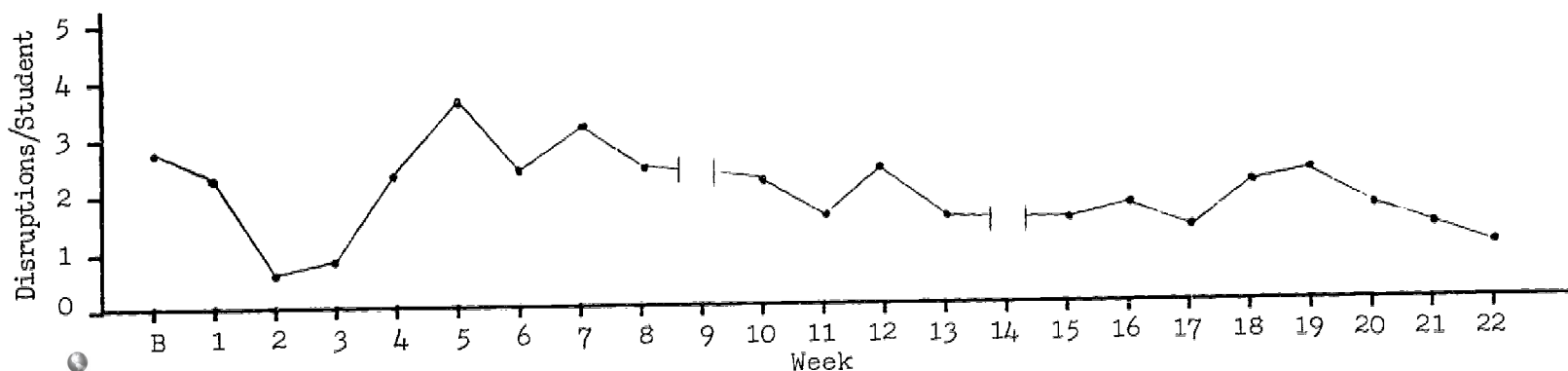
The whole tone becomes one of success. It becomes a place where varied and different activities are going on at the same time. Rather than desks in rows, learning centers appear. Rather than bedlam, productive activity is the order of the day

DOES IT WORK?

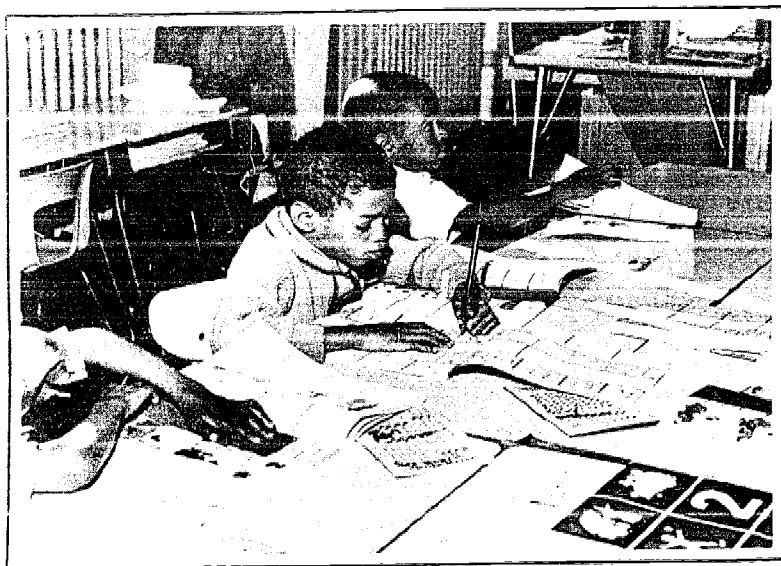
Observe the children.

While it is far too early in the program to be able to draw conclusions from the data collected, the evidence points to the conclusion that the success technique works. An informal observation tells one that the students in the classroom are clearly involved in what is going on. Their academic progress indicates that they may well be involved in learning.

The data collected to date indicate that the goals of behavior change are being met. This chart illustrating the decline in disruptive behavior is an illustration of such a goal:



- Disruptive Behavior -



Hopefully, yes. For children from negative environments, success in school could well make the difference between a productive or a nonproductive life. For all people, success is important. For these children, it is absolutely necessary. It is far too early to tell if *PROJECT SUCCESS* is going to make a real difference in the lives of these children. Additional data must be collected and analyzed before firm conclusions can be drawn. However, the children involved seem to have some very positive opinions:

I like Project Success because you get tickets. I got over 200 tickets.

I like Project Success because it is the best thing to help us kids . . . it makes sense.

You can buy time off to go to one of the centers, every day.

Project Success is OK with me because the teacher is OK with me.

Well, I like Project Success, and I think you will too.

ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Dr. Curtis Henson, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction
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